

Fran's Alzheimer's Voyage

A First-Hand Practical Account of
Caring for My Husband's Parents
In Our Home for Seven Years
— 2001-2008 —
Until Their Deaths

By

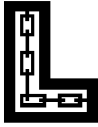
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58 Photos by

M.E. Stansfield (1912-2007), Leon Stansfield, Nancy Stansfield, Craig Stansfield

Foreword

My aging mother was already quite a distance into the dreadful scourge of Alzheimer's when she and Dad came to live with my wife and me in August, 2001, at our home in Stockton, California. We had moved from Colorado to Stockton in the summer of 2000 to teach in a Christian school. We had done nothing to formally prepare for their dependence upon us for care during their last seven years upon earth. However, we had always maintained a good relationship with them, and had spent a fair amount of time with them even from the beginning of our marriage many years previously.

“Home” for my folks (and for us young boys from about 1936 to 1953) was Grants Pass, Oregon. After our marriage in 1966, Elizabeth and I visited with my folks on numerous occasions, often spending several nights there. I lived with them as I helped my dad on building projects after my term in the army and for my summer work during my college years(as did all three of us boys). Most of the immediate family, and later spouses and children, often went on hikes, picnics, and camping trips with them during the summers. They came and spent time in our homes when we lived several states away from them. Elizabeth's and my work in teaching and school administration took us to Thurmont, Maryland; Gardiner, Oregon; Eugene, Oregon; Roseburg, Oregon; Central Point, Oregon; Rocky Boy, Montana; Tacoma, Washington; Roseville, California; Roseburg, Oregon (a second time, for sixteen years, where our two children completed their schooling through high school); Loveland, Colorado; and Stockton, California (where we have lived since 2000, and where they spent their last years with us). Dad and Mom helped us pack our moving

van for many of our moves.

Likewise, they visited Bryan and his family in such places as Madison, Wisconsin; Boston, Massachusetts; Zillah, Washington; Nogales, Arizona; and Tempe, Arizona.

They visited Nick and his family in Long Beach where they lived in the same house most of their lives – always with an eye to “keeping the score even.” Dad and Mom lived with Nick and Nancy for several months once or twice during the times they made major remodeling additions to their home.

I think there was a special place in Mom’s heart for me as her firstborn child, and therefore, in my heart for her. It just happened. However, during all our years of growing up our parents always strove to treat us all equally well. I always felt that their treatment of us three boys was even-handed, without overt favoritism, and based upon their knowledge of the need for right behavior in every situation. From my perspective, there were never any purposeful negative cutting remarks made to any of us boys, but only encouragements and reasonable discipline.

In the background of this story, Elizabeth’s and my personal lives and careers continued to move forward. In October, 2002, one year and a few months after the folks came, Elizabeth was employed full time as an instructional coach, and later as a classroom teacher, where she is still employed. I left my Christian school teaching job to work full time in a home improvement store near our home. At the time the folks came to live with us, I changed to part time work. After six years there I found it necessary to discontinue working outside our

home as the folks needed more care, and I was also working more on a publishing project which I had begun in 2000.

The publishing project was a Bible curriculum for Christian schools. I continued this project on a very limited basis during the years the folks lived with us, as time and energy allowed. After Mom's death in 2008, the Bible curriculum project became full time work until spring of 2012 when it was finally completed and the marketing campaign began for ***Read Thru The Word Bible Curriculum***, via the website www.readthrutheword.com.

Thus, Elizabeth and I were both very busy during the years my parents were with us. We both hope that our experiences during those years, though sometimes difficult, but which drew us closer to them, will be informative, useful and encouraging to anyone who also follows this path of caring for their own. We believe it has become quite a lost art—and a lost blessing—among most Americans today.

Leon Stansfield

October 2012

“Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.” (Exod 20:12 KJV)

“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” (1 Tim 5:8 KJV)

My husband, Leon, and I were not exactly prepared for that early morning call in July, 2001, from Leon's brother, Nick, stating, "Dad decided he wants to live with you and Liz, so you can take care of him and Mom. He can no longer manage her."

For several years we had been somewhat aware of Mom's embarking on her voyage on the Sea of Alzheimer's Disease. Dad had gotten a psychiatrist to evaluate her six years earlier in 1995 when she began showing unusual signs of forgetfulness. After giving her a battery of tests, the psychiatrist indicated Mom was probably in an early stage of Alzheimer's. At that time, all of the friends and neighbors disagreed with the diagnosis:

"No way! The psychiatrist is wrong. Fran is too intelligent."

"It is just dementia. After all, she is 79 years old."

Unfortunately, Alzheimer's is no respecter of persons or age. Fran, however, began to research Alzheimer's and found a study that maintained that a surplus of aluminum and metals in the body could be a contributing factor. She immediately got rid of all canned goods, and all products containing aluminum. She replaced her aluminum pots and pans with stainless steel. She had a dentist replace the mercury amalgam fillings in her teeth with ceramic fillings. All of her efforts did not stop the progression of Alzheimer's.

Much later, a study came out that seemed to prove that there is no relationship between the intake of metals and Alzheimer's. A later study indicated *unforgiveness* could be a contributing factor. That would make sense in Fran's case because she had battled forgiving others for much of her adult life. She had gone to coun-

selors, read books on the subject, gone to seminars, and prayed for a complete release. However, her battle to forgive finally culminated as she got deeper into Alzheimer's. She reached a point where she could not remember anything long enough to form or hold a grudge.



Fran was a teacher aide for many years. Here in 1967 at Age 50.



November 26, 1936 Wedding
at Grants Pass, Oregon

When Fran was 70 years old in 1986, we—her three sons and our wives—wanted to give her and Dad a fiftieth wedding anniversary, but she absolutely refused to allow the plans to continue. No way would she allow such a celebration. She said, “We have not had a perfect marriage, and I am not going to pretend to the world that nothing was wrong or that everything was a bed of roses.”

We tried to convince her that no marriage is perfect; every marriage has problems and challenges. We just wanted to celebrate the fact that they had successfully weathered the storms, and their love had pulled them through. Nothing doing!

However, by the time Mom and Dad’s *sixtieth* anniversary rolled around in the fall of 1996, Fran was eighty years old and ten more years into Alzheimer’s. Her strong will was beginning to weaken, or maybe she was forgetting some of the storms enough that we were able to pull off a big sixtieth anniversary celebration. We didn’t ask her or Dad if we could do this. Elizabeth and Leon, with Nancy and Nick, just went ahead with plans.

We were living in Roseburg, Oregon, about seventy-five miles north of Grants Pass. Nancy and Nick were living in Long Beach, California, nearing retirement. Dale Bryan and Kathleen were living in Tempe, Arizona. We were all able to spend much of the week preceding the celebration together at our home in Roseburg.



Our family building Leon & Liz's garage

Dad, at eighty-four, Nick, Bryan, and Leon built a 20x40 garage during that one week!

When the big day came for the celebration that Saturday, many relatives and friends joined us at the Isaak

Walton League log lodge at the east end of Grants Pass City Park. Fran and Mike enjoyed the festivities. Fran conducted herself well, including, although hesitantly, saying "I do" during the memorial recitation of their wedding vows, led by our brother-in-law, Irvin, a pastor in Medford. Dad absolutely loved it.



November 30, 1996 – 60th Anniversary at Grants Pass, Oregon

Somehow *I* forgot to get the ice cream from the freezer during the refreshment time! As a result, Dad's lifelong dream came true. He got all the ice cream he wanted for the next several months! Afterward, Fran wrote us a note of thanks that said it was one of the most enjoyable times they had ever had. (*see photocopy of the note on a later page.*) Sixty guests came. Dad said it was one guest for each of their sixty years of marriage. The anniversary photo and card album was one that Dad revisited many times during their years living with us. We did notice when looking at the photos that the sparkle had gone out of Fran's pretty blue eyes.



Mike and Fran's 70th Anniversary

By the time Mom and Dad's *seventieth* anniversary arrived, Fran was ninety years old and into late term Alzheimer's. We dressed her in her same beautiful blue dress she had worn for the sixtieth anniversary, and we had a private celebration in our home. They drank juice in the crystal stem ware they were given as a wedding gift seventy years earlier. Dad enjoyed it, but Fran had no clue what all the fuss was

about or even who her husband was at that point. It *was* a milestone which few ever reach.